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ABSTRACT

This study examined the shared experiences of student and teacher activists in light of current theoretical and political contexts of interest to social justice activists. The study involved collaborative in-depth interviews with and observations of seven student and four teacher activists in Alberta, Canada. The participants came from six ethnocultural groups (Asian, white Anglo-Saxon, African-Canadian, South American, and Indo-Canadian). Interviews examined participants' teaching assignments or grade levels, background training or personal involvement with diversity work, and/or experiences with discrimination. Participants described their own role in their school's particular group or project and shared specific aspects of its formation, goals, procedures, membership, and activities. They also provided information on administrative support, political climate, sustainability, achievements, challenges, and barriers to social justice activism. Overall, participants were frustrated by the pervasive and subtle nature of racism and other discrimination in their schools and communities. Many questioned the sincere commitment of their administrators or other personnel to focus on diversity issues. Participants had much to say about such issues as Afrocentric education, the backlash against diversity programs among peers, the pervasive denial of racism in society, and negotiating partnerships with community groups. (Contains 39 references.) (SM)

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Rolling up Our Sleeves in Social Justice Research: A Collaborative Study of School-Based Coalitions

Broadly framed, the present research seeks to chart the often contentious field of multicultural and antiracist pedagogy and map a clearer understanding of the practical realities of this work among a group of activist Canadian teachers and students. It analyzes the shared experiences of activists in light of current theoretical and political contexts of interest to social justice activists.

There is currently a problematic lack of engagement of young people in the academic literature, particularly related to their underappreciated role as active participants in social justice movements. This research project repositions student and teacher activist roles in schools and in educational research itself. In-depth interviews with 11 student and teacher participants reveal nuanced portraits of the people who choose to engage in social justice education and activism in actual school settings.

Theoretical Framework

This research falls within the broad field of critical social theory. Conducting my research in Canadian schools around issues of pluralism and social justice requires a theoretical stance that seeks intersections with political struggles across issues of "race," ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other elements of contested social identity. My understandings in this area are informed by a diversity of scholarship from British, Canadian, and American sources (e.g., Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Hall, 1992; Jaggar, 1983; McCarthy, 1990; Rattansi, 1992; Troyna, 1993) in which scholars resist monolithic or simplistic notions of pluralism and identity.

I situate my research within a non-synchronous, dynamic understanding of social justice, refined and revised in light of emerging insights from my collaboration with research participants. I follow the lead of cultural theorists such as Hall (1992), who eschews notions of identity as sets of "fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories" and therefore, rejects the biodeterministic origins of "race" as a category for dividing people, concluding that there are "no guarantees in Nature" on the basis of culturally constructed categories of difference (p. 254). Rather, my focus here is on an analysis of racism, the workings of which Hall succinctly summarizes:

> Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness. (p. 255)

My research participants and I shared a recognition of "race" as a social construction while acknowledging the racialized context of contemporary schooling. Our conversations explored the resultant material limitations faced by some individuals, as imposed both by the misguided attitudes and beliefs of others, and by existing systems and policies. Participants in the interviews regularly cite the pressing need to name racism and other discrimination as it reveals itself in a range of individual, institutional and societal forms.

I also appreciate the value of a broader consideration of diversity and equity to encompass a variety of related concerns on lived experiences of discrimination, oppression, and injustice. The important theoretical work being done entails seeking to identify and understand the complex intersections of a number of categories of social identity and conflict, including cultural, ethnic, and racialized identities, gender, sexual orientation, class, and physical ability. A broad orientation toward social justice also attends to individuals' multiple and overlapping identities. My specific attention to antiracist (AR) and multicultural (MC) education, loosely grouped here as social justice education, might be perceived to work against a larger political project of coalition-building across other differences, yet seems a prudent delimitation considering the sheer scope of the literature in each field of study.

Guiding Hypotheses

A qualitative, collaborative approach encouraged me to open my enquiry to a wide realm of

understanding and to retain a necessary degree of design flexibility; I formulated "general, flexible questions" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 28) to address the following expectations generated from my own readings and experiences. I present these as a set of "guiding hypotheses" that Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe as "merely tools used to generate questions and to search for patterns" (p. 37).

I shaped my initial research assumptions and questions using a selected team of long-time social justice activist colleagues from various settings around the province. These included a teacher-coordinator of a well-regarded student leadership camp in cultural diversity, a former anti-racism coordinator for a large urban school district, and the administrator of a non-governmental diversity serving agency. By e-mail, fax, and telephone, we brainstormed and shared ideas about possible questions and areas of vital concern for this study. A more specific set of salient issues emerged from these informal conversations.

I hypothesized that (a) teacher- and student-activists will neither seek nor value academic/research-based sources to inform their activism, (b) the debate between multicultural and antiracist education proponents is largely irrelevant to school-based activists, (c) administrative support from the school and district is necessary for effective social justice activism, (d) the conservative political climate and anti-diversity backlash inhibits activism in school settings, (e) current negative attitudes toward young people will limit the efficacy of school-based action groups, (f) a general denial of racism and other forms of discrimination in their communities and in Canada as a whole by the majority of students and teachers presents a barrier to social justice activism in those communities, (g) external recognition and acceptance by the broader community is important in validating and encouraging further activism by individuals and groups, (h) activism in school-based coalitions will lead many participants to further activism and political engagement in their lives outside the school, and they will extend their sharing and network-building through involvement in this research.

As suggested briefly below, and in greater depth in Lund (2002), the first five of these hypotheses were countered by several of my research participants while the latter three hypotheses were confirmed by a greater number of the activists I interviewed. In interviewing four teachers and seven students, I came to realize that we have much to learn about the creative responses that can be generated by collaborative school coalitions in overcoming seemingly insurmountable barriers to their ongoing work.

Rationale

A review of current educational research literature reveals a number of problematic features on the broad topic of education for diversity, equity, and social justice. Firstly there are relatively few detailed analyses of student social action projects in Canadian schools, aside from anecdotal or uncritical summaries of a few particular programs or activities (e.g., Berlin & Alladin, 1996; Lund, 1998; Smith & Young, 1996). This dearth of academic attention to successful school-based activist programs suggests that the work of practitioners is either undiscovered or undervalued by the research community. In either case, the present study will take steps to fill this gap in the literature and hopefully illustrate the benefits of closer engagement with the activist educational community.

Further, there is limited academic interest in young people in general. Apart from standardized surveys of student attitudes on diversity issues (e.g., Griffith & Labercane, 1995; Kehoe, 1994), students are rarely engaged in meaningful ways in educational research on social justice. This lack of scholarly attention to students seems a significant oversight in a discourse that ostensibly places their education at its centre. My research shines new light on a growing conservative backlash toward "youth" culture in general; Giroux (1996) notes that "youth as a self and social construction has become indeterminant, alien, and sometimes hazardous in the public eye, a source of repeated moral panics and the object of social regulation" (p. 11).

The inclusion of student voices in social justice pedagogy must go beyond co-opting a student or two to sit on an adult-driven committee or project. An exciting challenge for participants in the current research project has been to allow meaningful ways of engaging students in a

cooperative sharing of the responsibility for bringing about change in schools and communities. Allowing their traditionally silenced voices to be heard, we expose ourselves to some risk, and inevitable conflict and debate, but as Hargreaves (1996) insists,

> there are other voices worth articulating, hearing, and sponsoring as well as those of teachers. In the present context of reform and restructuring, perhaps the time has come to bring together the different voices surrounding schooling--students with teacher; teachers with parents--and risk cacophony in our struggle to build authentic community. (p. 16)

Instead of framing this potentially raucous dialogue as discordant, I prefer to describe it as an ongoing composition that does not necessarily require harmony.

When young people's concerns surrounding social justice are attended to by academics, their insights into issues of racism and other discrimination can be revelatory. A model of engaging young allies is proposed by SooHoo (1995) who describes her collaborations with students as a "syncopated rhythm." She observes that many educators systematically devalue student voices, and often "make unilateral decisions on what constitutes worthwhile knowledge because they lack faith and trust in students' capabilities" (p. 218). Her research project engages students as key informants and active collaborators/co-researchers throughout the investigation. For all of the challenges that emerge, this work suggests that such collaborative research efforts hold tremendous potential for enacting social justice ideals in the most relevant ways for students in schools. My intentional engagement of young activists as respected participants in my own research answers this timely call and signals an overdue acknowledgement of their significant roles as activists and informants in this area.

In addition, there are no in-depth studies into teachers' understandings of the complexities and contradictions in shaping social justice pedagogy in Canadian school-based programs. Many scholars recognize that teaching in Canada is a traditionally conservative profession with practitioners who typically resist change and innovation (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Solomon, 1995). This seems particularly true in relation to progress in social justice educational areas. For example, in a survey of over 1000 teachers across Canada, Solomon and Levine-Rasky (1994) uncover the dimensions of educators' resistance to multicultural and antiracist education. They assert that, "given the stability of the teaching culture and the ideological perspective that informs it, together with the depoliticized and uncritical framework of teacher education institutions, the relative lack of self-awareness and 'race' consciousness that teachers demonstrate is rationalized" (p. 11). Indeed, Solomon and Levine-Rasky find that educators consistently seek to avoid contentious issues, and specifically that "denial and reluctance to name the problem of racism and thus the need for an antiracist pedagogy remains a most tenacious obstacle" (p. 12).

Rather than setting out in advance the specific research focus and guiding questions, I opened my research design to incorporate how teachers and students understand and incorporate the various conceptions of and approaches to multicultural and antiracist education in their own terms. Including current practitioners in several stages of my research allows our mutual exploration of critical current issues, and addresses directly the under-analyzed roles of teacher and student activists as producers of knowledge on social justice issues.

The value of this study's contributions to the field of social justice activism is based upon the participants arriving collaboratively at significant understandings of the practical experiences of a relatively small number of activists. In drawing insights from the work and thoughts of educators and theorists who share an educational goal to address issues of equity and justice in Canadian schools, this collaborative research project allowed my participants and I to seek a more nuanced and complex understanding of the way social justice pedagogy is theorized, contested, and enacted in school-based coalitions. To the extent that these insights might inform others working in similar settings and who share similar goals, I consider this research a valuable first step.

Despite the effusive language of empowerment and emancipation from many critical theorists, what is often missing in current social justice education is a tangible link to practice in schools and education faculties. Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that because theory development and

practice do not happen separately from one another, there is a "synergistic and dynamic relationship that exists between the two.... true, theory informs practice, but practice also informs theory" (pp. 752-753). This research project suggests that as more educators build activist coalitions with their students and colleagues, a simultaneous growth in the academic interest in their social justice projects can reflexively inform both research and theorizing in a reciprocal relationship.

Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in Canada

Our ongoing work is also situated within, and informed by, a unique historical and political context in Canada. It is noteworthy that recent conservative reforms to public policy have already significantly affected multicultural policies and programming in Alberta. Even though organizations and professional educational bodies addressing diversity still exist in Alberta, virtually all of them have faced restructuring and downsizing in recent years.

In its relatively brief history, the field of education attending to equity issues in Canada has undergone much transformation. Specifically on ethnocultural and racialized issues, it has evolved in the past few decades under the umbrella of multicultural education with significant influences from, and interactions with, antiracism and other perspectives (Dei, 1996; Ghosh, 1996; Moodley, 1995). Canada remains one of the few nations with multicultural ideals entrenched into national government policy, including the 1984 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act.* As well, this country's historical immigration patterns and policies, social and educational institutions, and public responses differ in significant ways from those of other countries, affecting the singular development of Canadian educational policies, curriculum, research, and practices in this area (Corson, 2000; Fleras & Elliot, 1992; Kymlicka, 1998; Moodley, 1995).

Complicating the current discourse on diversity is a pervasive notion that Canada has always stood for harmony and acceptance; evidence exists that this is a profound distortion. The assumed absence of racism in Canada is refuted by a long history of discriminatory government and corporate policies and practices. Official government policies, formulated and implemented with popular public support, served to entrench, among other examples, racial segregation in schools, forced assimilation of First Nations Canadians, racialized immigration restrictions, anti-Semitism, the mistreatment of Chinese immigrant railway workers, and the displacement and internment of Japanese-Canadians (Baergen, 2000; Boyko, 1995; Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 1995; Ward, 1992). Even the obvious actions of contemporary racist hate groups in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada are typically downplayed (Kinsella, 1994). For various reasons, such unsavoury aspects of Canadian history have been excluded or distorted in virtually all current social studies school materials, and by many in political and administrative positions. Currently, there is strong public debate in Canada about the value of any form of multicultural education, and indeed, of the concept of multiculturalism itself.

Within the academic discourse, however, there is widespread consensus on the historical basis of racism in Canada, and on highlighting the benefits of immigration and cultural pluralism toward building a strong and vibrant democracy. Scholars have begun the monumental task of examining past forms of colonialism and subjugation based on racialized categories, toward educating for a socially just society (e.g., Said, 1993). Reflecting on this matter, Willinsky (1998) observes that "schools have offered students little help in fathoming why this sense of difference in race, culture, and nation is so closely woven into the fabric of society" (p. 5). Placing the onus back on the education system to correct its past wrongs, he concludes that students "need to see that such divisions have long been part of the fabric and structure of the state, including the schools, and they need to appreciate that challenging the structuring of those differences requires equally public acts of refusing their original and intended meanings" (p. 5). To me, this is a clear call for precisely the models of school-based activism being explored and promoted in this research.

Much of the contention in this field focuses on the recurrent and sometimes acrimonious disputes between supporters of two specific variants of social justice research and theory. Some

Canadian researchers have depicted social justice education as a highly divisive field of study, describing conflicts between multicultural and antiracist camps in dichotomous, oppositional terms (e.g., Kehoe, 1994; McGregor & Ungerleider, 1993). I wish to avoid simplified bipolar constructions or positions that deny the complexity of school-based activism.

Methodology

My approach to this research falls within the broad category of qualitative methods. This study entails both my soliciting and sharing understandings about the everyday life of social justice leaders, thereby valuing the discovery of participants' perspectives on their own activism. This view of inquiry sees research as an interactive process between myself as researcher and the research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I believe that the development of theory and the improvement of practice in education can and often do take place at the same time. This is particularly true for those engaged in movements working toward progressive social change around contentious issues of diversity, equity, and human rights.

As Dei reminds us, "the antiracism worker must ground theory in actual political practice. Social justice activism is more than theorizing about change. It is about engaging in political practice informed by theory of social change, at the same time as the theory itself is refined by political practice" (1996, p. 127). A teacher-activist and researcher myself, I support the notion that a primary goal for educational researchers is "to develop theories of educational practice that are rooted in the concrete educational experiences and situations of practitioners" (Carr & Kemmis, 1983, p. 116). In fact, I have intentionally tested this research project itself as a vehicle for facilitating social justice activism, an instrument of community building among a small group of teachers and students.

I gathered primary data mainly in the form of in-depth collaborative interviews. Although my research involved interviews, participant-observation, and other data gathering methods over two and a half years, I did not spend an extended length of time immersed in any one setting. Most importantly, I sought a respectful engagement with the everyday activism of the participants, adopting certain features of a critical ethnographic approach adapted from Simon and Dippo (1986), and refined more recently by Carspecken (1996). That is, while paying deliberate attention to my own values and assumptions I endeavoured to understand participants' perspectives in their own terms, through a commitment to a collaborative process of discovery and analysis through interaction.

My stance here was sensitive to structural and institutional constraints on social activism--particularly in school settings and in a conservative political climate--some of which may not have been articulated directly by the actors in those settings. This sometimes involves significant personal or professional risk, as is noted by some of my participants. As Herr (1999) observes from her own research exploring social justice concerns in secondary school settings, there are often unanticipated outcomes that may result from enquiries that question existing practices and policies of an institution. She warns that school-based researchers "should expect then that as our research efforts help the push for school change, forces within the institution will push back" (p. 15). Also, my own assumptions, biases, and identity in my role as researcher were subject to analysis, as I situated my observations, the participants' accounts of their practice, and my own participation and analysis within complex existing social contexts.

In attending to the standards and justifications of critical ethnography, I also acknowledge my concern with the precarious positions often taken by critical researchers, arising from confusing theoretical stances and unspecified desired social outcomes. Also uncomfortable for me is the problematic goal of "empowerment," as if power is something to be disbursed by researchers. I attended to the complex and variable power relationships that emerge in research, but eschew simplistic notions of its one-way movement or manipulation. Nevertheless, I consider my stance to be critical in a broader sense, acknowledging structural and systemic barriers to equity. I believe framing racism and other discrimination simply as instances of individual misunderstanding would have seriously limited my enquiry.

Selection of Research Participants

I identified existing social justice groups using a "community nomination" method of selection, following the work of Foster (1993), locating them through direct contact with my network of teacher colleagues, professional associations, government agencies, community activists, and the like. My participants in this project included seven student and four teacher activists from across the western Canadian province of Alberta. Their personal length of experience in this field ranged from one year to over 25 years. Three of the participants lived and engaged in activism in rural or smaller urban settings. They came from a variety of ethnocultural groups; by their own self-identification, my participants included people from Asian, white Anglo-Saxon, African-Canadian, South American Latina, and Indo-Canadian backgrounds.

Interviews began with my gathering information about each participant's teaching assignment or grade level and any relevant background training or personal involvement with diversity work and/or experiences with forms of discrimination. Participants were then asked to describe their own role in their school's particular group or project, and share specific aspects of its formation, goals, procedures, membership, and examples of activities. Further exploration included issues of administrative support, political climate, sustainability, achievements, challenges and barriers to their social justice activism.

The interviews were conducted much in the manner of a conversation between colleagues, a dialogic process that naturally entailed some self-disclosure on my part. As a fellow teacher and social justice activist, I incorporated my insider status to gain the respect and trust of my teacher participants in an honest and ethical process of building rapport. As a long-time educator and parent of two children, I expressed genuine interest in the unique experiences and perspectives of the student activists. I had a genuine commitment to learn and grow together with each of my participants, but was conscious, nonetheless, of our potentially differential power locations within institutions and across other social boundaries. I took specific steps to foreground this awareness as I made research decisions along the way.

After participants and I negotiated shared meanings in interviews, I brought the transcripts and my preliminary analyses of them back to the participants in order to incorporate a democratic process of data generation; participants had the right to modify their words to reflect more accurately their intended meanings, to delete material, and to contribute to analysis if they so desired. This was not undertaken with the goal of "equalizing" our respective roles in the research project. I was aware that participants were unlikely to place the same value on this stage of the research, and were under no obligation to take on this additional role. There were no significant alterations of interview data. Our emerging understandings are an important aspect of the reciprocity between participants in this study.

Specific aspects of our different positionalities that may have influenced our engagement included my association with a university and the additional scholarly intentions emerging from my involvement with this project--namely, a doctoral dissertation. I was sensitive to the fact that I would be using the meanings we generated for my own academic purposes, and fully informed my participants of this, along with other detailed information about their involvement. I provided them with a safe and comfortable venue in which to collaborate, with ongoing reminders of their freedom to withdraw at any time. Of course, this did not absolve me of my unwavering commitment to do no personal or professional harm to my participants. In fact, as I explain below, I believe that there was significant reciprocity built into this study.

One teacher, Gail, and I had known of each other in the activist community before the interview, and had sought funding from the same sources in the past, so we were not complete strangers discussing our activist groups operating in different high schools. Still, she may hold preconceptions of what a research session might entail; Gail concludes the interview by saying, "Well, this was quite painless! Thank you. I was kind of worried about how official it might be, being a doctoral kind of thing." Teachers are often stereotyped as being skeptical of academia, and this may be based on the reality of perceived power differentials and hierarchical issues that

characterize traditional interactions between schools and universities. However, the teachers (and some students) I interviewed have an active interest in keeping current with academic and professional literature they perceive to be of relevance to their daily practice as social justice activists. My role here as a bridge between those worlds may serve as a reminder, both of the potential for collaborative approaches toward social justice activism, and of the mutually beneficial relationships that can be nurtured between scholars and activists in this field.

I also recognize that I hold a public position as an acknowledged "expert" of sorts in the field, a situation that likely figured, perhaps in contradictory ways, in interactions with fellow teacher-activists and student activists in this field. I addressed this in each first contact with the participating teachers and students. Although I did not seek to disavow my perceived status, I endeavoured to note how it influenced aspects of this study. I expected that for some individuals, an awareness of my "successes" in this field would inhibit their own candid admissions of conflicts, struggles, or perceived failures. As I note below, I now believe it actually had the opposite effect, creating an insider's trust that opened our conversation to more honest reflections.

Ted really seems to enjoy discussing issues related to racism and diversity. He expounds on his past work as a researcher and writer in this field, and opens up new avenues of exploration for future studies. As founders of parallel groups addressing diversity within the same province during the same era, we often find ourselves completing sentences for each other, clearly "on the same wavelength" for much of the interview. Like others with whom I spoke, Ted offers that he would value being sent regular correspondence from the various social justice groups with which I am associated, and welcomes being kept abreast of my research as it unfolds.

I also drew on my past experiences to facilitate informed questioning, open the dialogue to relevant issues, and contribute my share to the collaborative building of frameworks through which to understand our practice. My commitment to collaboration means that I did far more listening than talking, welcomed and responded thoughtfully to any oppositional or contradictory views, and remained open to challenges to my own beliefs and activities. Indeed, as I strived with others to arrive at useful understandings of social justice pedagogy, even moments of conflict became rich opportunities for understanding, and for mutual personal and professional growth.

Ethical Considerations with Young Participants

Opening my research to include the voices of young people engaged in social activism in schools offered a unique set of challenges, some of which I tried to anticipate in advance. As mentioned above, I did not view this sharing as "empowering" students but simply fulfilling a long-overdue responsibility to engage them meaningfully in this discourse, respecting their agency as activists who wish to share ideas and seek a deeper understanding of social justice issues. My identity as a teacher, while beneficial in liaisons with other teachers, may have set up preconceived barriers to trust and disclosure based on established notions of roles and professional distance. Again, I drew on my skills at rapport-building, my genuine interest in the issues, my role as a parent, and my experiences with students over several years of teaching, coaching, and coordinating student programs. There are special emotional vulnerabilities of adolescent life, and power issues in adolescent-adult engagements that cannot be "mediated away" by any predetermined plans. The complexity of personal identities and exposures that emerge in such research relationships is daunting, but I believe my strict adherence to high ethical standards served me well in this endeavour.

I kept a personal research journal in which I recorded potential concerns, questions, my subjective responses to the data, participants, the settings themselves, and my reactions to other elements of my research project. This assisted my revealing and addressing my own biases, assumptions, blind spots, conflicts, and value judgements during such an intensive research enterprise. Throughout, I also remained conscious of my own position of privilege along virtually every possible category, defined by a social system that accepts these characteristics as an unstated dominant norm. There were no simple means of addressing this, apart from a commitment to deliberate, conscious, and ongoing critical self-reflection in every social interaction.

Insights from the Interviews on my Role as Researcher/Teacher/Activist

As my methodology for this study is based on a collaborative engagement with fellow activists, I held no expectations that I could remain a neutral observer or passive participant in the interviews. In fact, I made efforts to include my own experiences in social justice activism wherever it seemed appropriate or was requested by the participants. My experiences while interviewing each activist confirmed for me that my background as a teacher and scholar in this field contributed positively to the conversations on building activist coalitions of teachers and students in public schools.

A strength of my collaborative approach is that this research format works to understand and assist current practitioners with improving their practice. My contributions to the dialogue are based on my experiences, grounded in daily work with the ongoing Students and Teachers Opposing Prejudice (STOP) activist group I continue to advise (Lund, 1998). My current involvement entails helping to organize weekly meetings, plan events, raise funds, and participate in a variety of projects with related agencies, and our work is regularly featured in local, provincial, and national media.

All of the people I interviewed knew of my work with the STOP program before agreeing to be interviewed, and some had even worked with me on various committees and planning groups in the field. As in many fields, social justice activism is indeed a "small world" in Alberta; in some cases, student members of STOP had been in contact with student members of their activist groups through various youth camps and conferences. During our interviews I never directly asked my participants any pointed questions about my own status as a recognized diversity activist, but from questions and comments they offered, I inferred that my role did not serve as a deterrent to the goals of this research. Rather, I believe that my profile in the field actually helped create a comfortable environment where participants felt they could explore specific issues with someone who may have insights into or expertise with their own concerns.

Many of the people I interviewed for this project shared that they had found themselves in direct or indirect contact with the STOP program over the years. Lisa, a student at a Catholic high school, had participated in promoting a musical benefit fund-raising event sponsored by STOP, and had seen a variety of media coverage of me and our group's activities over the past several years. Rather than inhibiting their participation in my research, some of the students credit their exposure to students in our program with initiating their desire to become activists in the first place.

In addition, some of the teachers with whom I spoke will regularly encourage their students to participate in STOP's annual poster and poetry contest, initiated in 1987. Bonnie also brings up the STOP program as a way of initiating a discussion on ownership and coalition building with other groups. She shares that her current student action group has been feeling some growing pains as it works out its relationship with its community partners. Other participants would also build on an assumption of my tacit understanding of the vicissitudes of social activism--including working through tensions from cooperating with other agencies--and were able to delve more deeply into their own specific situations. Together we were able to share our understandings of effective practice and problem-solving in a common endeavour.

Ted and I have never worked together on any board or committee at the same time, but our activities with various activist organizations have taken overlapping or parallel paths in several instances. For instance, I have joined boards on which Ted is a well-respected past member, and students of mine have participated in an ongoing multicultural education program that he helped to found over a decade ago. We have each engaged with research that the other has conducted and published. At the school level, he formed an activist group with students just about a year before the STOP group formed. Ted notes this coincidence and expresses admiration at our group's longevity: "That's the thing isn't it, to be able to see it move on. STOP has been going for so many years! We formed [our group] in 1986, so it was just about the same era--a sister/brother thing." Our interconnected professional lives provide a strong foundation for exploring issues of relevance to teacher activists working in the same province and with the same level of students.

With other participants, I found the traditional role as researcher being turned around as they questioned me on various aspects of my own experiences with STOP and other specific activities. Typically, I would be exploring some aspect of their group's work in schools with teachers and students collaborating on projects, and the person being interviewed would spontaneously ask how STOP has tackled a specific problem. As I responded, I was careful not to let my own enthusiasm for this work overtake my wish to learn from my participants. Rather, I sought to build on the interaction as fostering a rapport between practitioners caught in a moment of "putting our heads together" on a specific issue.

That the student, Ramona, had met me previously and had interacted with members of our school's own activist group helps us identify concrete examples of issues that have been of direct concern to her own activism in her school. Her sister, Sabrina, also requests some feedback from me regarding her school group's efforts to link with Amnesty International, and their participation in a national contest to promote diversity. When I tell her that I have adjudicated that particular competition, she enthusiastically asks me specific questions about locating research materials and about the criteria for judging. In this case, my past experiences in this field open up another rich area of discussion for our interview, and we share disappointing stories of each of our group's unsuccessful experiences with entering a recent national antiracism competition. Commiserating in failures can even be a remarkably good way to build solidarity among activists.

Jason and Steve are also interested in rectifying a problem that they perceive has started to develop in their fledgling group; Steve wishes for their program to be more successful at attracting and retaining new members, and seeks my guidance: "Maybe you could help us with this.... we have a much lower attendance of new members, perhaps because they didn't feel they were part of the group, and we didn't have enough stuff to do. How do you deal with that?" My response forces me to reflect on the complex work of building and sustaining a viable school program, and their wish to have input on a problem reminds me of the mutual benefits of this collaborative approach.

With each participant, I find myself seeking and holding the common threads that bind us, and using these to weave together a strong enough material to sustain our honest explorations into this area. That I have been recognized widely for my activism seems to solidify the research relationship with each participant, and establish a common ground on which to build our understandings. As reported in the chapters to follow, we delve into issues of leadership, membership, and continuity, and find our collaborative responses to the questions that arise to be of value. I suppose it is a common conversational skill to build on commonalities and affirm shared experiences, but in this research project it validates emerging insights and fosters the collaboration that we hope to model in our own activism.

Results

By testing my hypotheses against the ideas and understandings of my research participants I sought to illuminate our work in the light of actual school-based activism. As my full research report (Lund, 2002) outlines, the first five of these hypotheses were countered by several of my research participants while the latter three hypotheses were confirmed by a greater number of them. One example of a hypothesis confirmed by my participants was that (f) a general denial of racism and other forms of discrimination in their communities and in Canada as a whole by the majority of students and teachers presents a barrier to social justice activism in those communities.

During our interviews, several participants in this research express their frustration at the pervasive and subtle nature of racism and other discrimination in their schools and the community at large. In many cases, they share examples and situations that illustrate the difficulties of planning and implementing social justice action in their groups in the face of a denial of a problem with racism in the first place.

In Cathy's rural high school, for example, she admits that she and her colleagues did not believe that their homogeneous and mostly white school could possibly have any concerns about racism: "A lot of people don't really think that racism is a problem at all at [our school]." However,

when they conducted a large survey, one question was included about students' personal experiences with racism. The results came as a shock to Cathy and her principal; she explains, "we've never thought of having a racism problem because we're basically all white!" Her comments here suggest that she holds the belief that increased diversity based on physical racialized characteristics will most likely lead to more problems in the school, reflecting concerns raised by several AR researchers about the problematic discourse around difference in education.

Cathy thinks any efforts to expose and eliminate racism may face internal obstacles in light of their school's demographics. She sees the rural students they serve as being "very set in their ways" and says that "with them I find that I don't see any blatant racism throughout the school, but when we try to do diversity events, there are some who seem like they could care less." Cathy also admits that her own relatively limited experience with diversity has also affected her ability to identify or fully understand potentially racist situations. She reflects that she is just beginning to analyze some of the entrenched racism that undergirds our contemporary society, especially in her home community in rural Alberta.

In her small Albertan town, Gail also finds it difficult to address racism in her classes and in her activist student group. They typically choose MC activities designed to build an awareness of the growing diversity, even in their community. But still, she finds a reluctance by her students to address racialized differences. She shares an example from a few years ago:

> During the first year I taught, my students had to write all these statements about themselves, and I had this one student who said "I'm the one who's chocolate" and I thought wow, that's really cool. And every time I see her I think, she's the colour of my favourite kind of chocolate! And she calls attention to it herself, almost because, people will see she's black but they don't want to say Black. Or if a kid is Chinese they don't want to say Chinese because they think it's politically incorrect.

Gail sees a peculiar situation developing in her fairly homogeneous white rural school that she suspects is happening elsewhere. On the one hand, mainstream media sources have created a heightened state of racialized awareness among students with highly publicized news coverage of everything from accusations of racist police, to equity legislation, to racism in the music business, to immigration debates, to racism in the army. Yet somehow, the discourse in our public schools has become stultified, partly over students' fears of stirring up controversy by frankly addressing issues of difference.

Even in urban settings, teachers and students find their work is inhibited by the view that racism, if it even exists, should not be mentioned directly in the struggle for fairness in schools. Sina tells me that at her large and diverse urban high school, no one really talks about racism, and she herself downplays any conflicts there: "It's just little comments, stereotyping mostly," she says about her own school's current climate around racism. "We have so many different kinds of people and we all get along. We don't really have that many fights."

Later I ask Sina if she has personally experienced racism as an Indo-Canadian and she reports that yes, she has, but that the discrimination she notices the most typically stems from her religion:

> When I tell people that I'm Muslim they automatically think that I'm from Arabia and that I'm a terrorist. But me, because I look more Indian than Arabian, people are more accepting of me than others even though we're the same faith. So I've experienced that. A friend of mine who used to work with me, people thought he was a terrorist because he's Muslim. He actually went to pick up a package that was delivered to him and people thought it was a bomb. He was just carrying it home and people thought it was a bomb! That's all you hear is Islamic terrorists.

She eventually draws a connection between her status as a member of a "visible minority" group and the very real potential for facing racist discrimination in hiring practices in the workplace:

> Because everyone still, in their mind, they have an idea of what the ideal world is to them. So when we go for a job and go for that interview and we fit their ideal, then we'll get

> hired, but if we don't and somebody else does, then they'll get hired. I think in that sort of way [racism exists] because in society right now, nobody really speaks out what they're thinking. So if someone is secretly thinking: "I really don't want to hire that person because I think that there'd be conflicts at my job" you wouldn't say that, you'd just make up some excuse and be like, "I can't hire you because of this."

Although she sees her racialized identity possibly limiting her employment opportunities due to hidden forms of racism, she seems at first oblivious to more systemic forms existing in her school and society.

When I ask Sina about the possibility of there being built-in barriers to people based on their racialized identities, she immediately responds with generalized comments about Canadian society becoming "more accepting. Everywhere you look you see somebody who's different, so I think that we've become more accepting of it as a society. But of course there are still lots of problems with Native people." Even as she speaks of our accepting society, she is reminded of lessons on systemic racism from First Nations elders from a recent cultural leadership camp she attended: "They told us their side of the story, because we just hear what the government's saying, so in a way, we sort of form a judgement on them before we've actually understood their side." She seems able to scratch the surface of these underlying issues, but as it turns out, finds little success in maintaining an active AR group in her school.

Some teachers and students I interviewed questioned the sincere commitment of their administrators or other school personnel to even want to expose serious underlying concerns related to diversity that may already exist in their schools and school districts. It seems clear that many within the public school system are hesitant to concede that racism or other discrimination exists at all in their schools. Perhaps they fear repercussions to such exposure, including negative media coverage and emotionally charged parental responses. Examples abound of inflammatory stories documenting alleged "racial tensions" or "ethnic violence" at particular schools (including, perhaps not inconsequentially, the very school at which Sina tries in vain to get an activist student group established.) Administrators and other staff at affected schools may suddenly find themselves engaged in politicized "spin control" efforts that consume valuable resources, and may shy away from activist movements that promise to shed more light on these very issues.

With these and other concerns in mind, some principals and district administrators are justifiably cautious in addressing contentious issues. The staff and students who wish to expose and explore diversity issues within their schools and communities are left frustrated by the resulting inaction. Unknowingly mirroring the situation faced by Cathy's principal in the wake of survey results of his own, Ted paints a similar scenario from the perspective of a hypothetical administrator who may fear the results of a student survey that asks about racism:

> If you're doing a survey of students in the school, you want to find out where your school is at for school development, let's say. And as one of your sources of data for creating a school improvement plan, maybe you want to ask students questions. Well, are you willing to ask the question: "Do you feel that racism is at work in some way or another?" There may be better wording to a question than that, but that gets at the issue. Many administrators simply don't want to ask that question because, well, what if they answer yes? What are the implications to that?

Granted, sometimes principals and others may simply be unaware of problems existing in their schools. As a student, Sabrina, stated, "it's not that these people are bad or anything. They just don't know." But in Ted's experience, the denial of racism by school administrators is "a huge barrier" to AR work in schools.

Likewise, Bonnie describes the difficulty faced by some students and staff when her AR group first formed, admitting that, "initially, there was that reaction: 'Do I want to participate? It's bad enough as it is. I don't want to put lights up out there.' So that was difficult for a number of students, that whole risk around making a pronouncement about racism." This evident reluctance to embrace an activist group that used terminology such as racism also appeared among some staff

members:

> We had some difficulty around the [group] and talking about racism in school. Questions from teachers like, "Well, couldn't that just be Safe and Caring Schools?" and you need to deal with these teachers, but most of us felt strongly that we wanted racism on the table. We needed it for it to be dealt with, and not to talk about harmony in general. So that has been a struggle, which I know will never, well I shouldn't say never go away; we know it's part and parcel of the kind of work we do, but to me it reinforces why it needs to be done.

For Bonnie, the serious barrier presented by the desire of many educators and students to deny or avoid frank discussions of racism has become yet another incentive to continue her activism in this area.

Although her views confirm my hypothesis, I am a bit surprised that, in a culturally pluralistic urban setting, this resistance might be felt just as strongly as in rural schools. When I mention this to Bonnie, she speculates on one possible reason for this mind-set: "I experience [the denial of racism] even here, where we're a very diverse, multi-ethnic community. People show resistance and fear that putting it on the table will let more surface. Well, that's sort of like the idea that if you teach sex education, kids will become more promiscuous." Her goal is to put the issues "on the table" for a frank exploration:

> I would like to believe that if [our group] takes on and does a good job, what we should hopefully see is not confrontation, but that whole notion of students being able to say to one another, "Where is that statement coming from?" And to me that's not more of it, that's dealing with it. And rather than just slithering it away or it's hidden under the table, our kids knowing, okay, name-calling takes place, that there are strategies in place. That you don't need to suffer by yourself with whatever it is that's going on. If that means that more of it surfaces, I think it's like spousal abuse or any of those issues: you let it be known that there are steps in place and therefore the reporting occurs much more. That's good!

Bonnie sees her efforts to expose the hidden racism in her school as being inextricably linked to confronting the resistance that surrounds mentioning racism by name. Confronting the fear that this may expose even more racism, she decides that this could actually become a worthy goal for any school activist to pursue.

In her pursuit of a more open dialogue on racism, Bonnie often faces direct resistance to her work, including being dismissed as speaking "on her soap box again." As a Black female activist, she makes a deep personal connection with herself and her work in schools: "I live and breathe it every day of my life. It's always in my face. And I say that in the sense of, because I'm a visible minority I can't get away from it." She shares that this focus on racism comes with a constant inner tension based on the external opposition to her AR efforts:

> There is that division between where it's seen as a self interest and where it's seen as the good work that needs to be done, and you do see that dichotomy. For the staff involved it's that rocking the boat. Racism is not an easy topic to raise even in a staff room. It's run from, and I've seen that in every school I've been to. We'll talk about kids being so cruel to each other but we rarely say, and the basis is racism. And then we have the challenge: is it or isn't it? But at least throw it out there, as this is a possibility, a strong, strong one. What else could it be? But there's the defensiveness that surfaces, and on both sides. So there's that leeriness about this whole issue and how do we talk about it? How do we get to the point where we're not afraid to say, "Okay I'm considering that it might be racism"?

Bonnie leaves the question as rhetorical and unanswered, but her continued efforts in organizing AR activism in her school and with other community groups--her fervent desire to keep educating others--seems to be the best answer for now.

Also prevalent in urban Alberta is the widely accepted view that racism is now becoming a thing of the past in our progressive multicultural mosaic. Bonnie, who considers herself as up-to-date on her readings in AR literature, has found that unsavoury events involving racism in

Canadian history are often hidden. She shares a recent example: "There was a book that talked about segregated schools out East, and something about 1968, and I said 'I was a teenager then! You folks had segregated schools?'"

That this national propensity for denying Canada as a site of racism, as opposed to the United States, for example, presents a barrier to the work being done by AR activists is expressed directly by several of the students I interviewed. Steve reflects this naive view in his description of his own metamorphosis from sheltered mainstream student into AR activist:

> Naturally I assumed that Canada was a very culturally accepting country, but upon becoming part of this group and looking more into the subject I found a lot of instances of discrimination and racism that I never thought were there. That upset me very much, because I feel that racism and animosity and clashes over differences, they don't work in a country like Canada.

His comments also subtly reveal the strength of our national desire to think of ourselves as a welcoming country that stands for the accepting of differences.

Later in our interview, Steve declares that "racism has a hand in every aspect of our society," and that "we all have whitewashed our racist past. History is written by the winners, essentially, and the winners always want to have a positive outlook on their past." He suggests that his group's activism focuses on education because Canadian students need more opportunities to learn more about both the good and bad in their national history:

> I think we should look back on our past with a sense of shame, not with ultimate pride, but just with the idea that we're looking at our past and analyzing it to see what we can do better. We shouldn't look at it like we're the best country in the world. We should look at it logically and from enough of a distance to say: "We could do better in all ways."

He cites the example of the interment of Japanese Canadians during World War II as an event where the candid exploration of racism would help students to better understand contemporary manifestations of hatred:

> [Confronting racism] enables us to understand the kind of atmosphere that created that kind of event and emotion, and you can avoid that occurrence again. Once you understand the mentality and what was going on, like why did we accept it when we're so disgusted by it now, we can avoid that in the future.

Steve concludes that developing a critical sensibility among young people is a vital first step for groups like his toward eliminating racism in Canada. His ultimate goal is to have each of us become more skeptical and analytical of everything from a social justice perspective:

> It comes down to ultimately questioning our beliefs. When you don't look at our immigration policy and say it's fine because everything else is fine. It still carries traces of a racist past. You don't look at science, and the system as it is today and just say it's fine now. You always have to question, question, question. Never to be content really.

According to Steve, not enough of us are able to look critically at our own complicity in perpetuating a system that routinely masks its racist underpinnings.

For white students this is especially difficult, even among those working to expose and eliminate racism. Steve admits:

> It's difficult. For me, I'm basically a protected guy. I haven't experienced, I mean, I've seen racism but I haven't experienced racism first hand. So if people say "You must be doing it out of the goodness of your heart" it sounds like you're doing it for yourself, and I don't want to be doing it for myself. I don't know. I've always wanted to--I honestly don't know, it's very hard to evaluate why you're doing it. It makes me feel good, so maybe I am being a bit selfish in that sense.

His inherent inability to experience racism directly only adds to the already difficult task of confronting and discussing existing sources of oppression. These barriers to exposing racist issues among his fellow students remind Steve of the importance of continuing with his own education, and with his group's focus on educating other young people.

One of his partners in activism, Daria, agrees in a separate interview that Canadians have an uncanny ability to bury existing racism, often by expressing feel-good sentiments about our diversity:

> It's a reality. We all know that there is racism in our community, but I find that a lot of people are in denial of it, especially here in Canada where we like to say "Oh yes, we're this wonderful, peaceful, multicultural society," or "My best friend is an African-American," and that's I guess what Dr. Hedy Fry would call "sugar-coating" the issue. I get really frustrated when that happens.

In fact, Daria claims, Canadians' view of ourselves presents a particularly difficult obstacle to her group when addressing AR issues:

> It's a little harder to pinpoint because what I find, I mean, Canada is great when it comes to dealing with racial tensions; I think that we've done a lot in terms of our laws and in terms of the government funding that anti-racist programs receive. We can't be complacent though, and we have to realize that there is that hidden, systemic racism, almost to the extent where you see it as being an aspect of everyday life rather than seeing it as something that's abnormal, something that is racist or hurtful to others.

When I press her for a specific example, Daria cites the reluctance by some members of marginalized communities to name racism. In her recent personal experience, a conversation with an active member of a diversity-serving community revealed a tendency that is, for her, emblematic of this problem:

> People have a hard time using the word "racism" or referring to a certain action that a government organization or business organization does as "racist" and that in itself is a hindering force for us to try to open up this systemic racism. I was talking to a man who is the director of Aboriginal Services at [a local university] and he was talking about how his program has been underfunded for, I think 20 years he said, and how other programs are being funded and funds are being increased for other programs but not for the Aboriginal. We were talking about certain incidents that individuals have to go through at [this university]--for example, essays that professors have given a bad grade to because an Aboriginal student chose to develop the essay according to their beliefs of their way of thinking--and I asked him, "Do you think that in itself is racism?" and he said: "I wouldn't say racism; racism is a harsh word to use," and so just that!
>
> People who have experienced racism or who see it, and they don't use the term when it should be used so as to bring attention to it, I think that in itself is stopping people from digging into the racist incident and trying to make sense of it and trying to find the origins of it to come to a solution, or confront it at least, because a barrier is already being created [by saying]: "Oh, it's not exactly racism."

For Daria and her AR group, the best way to deal with such denial and avoidance of racism is to step up their efforts to educate themselves to better educate others that it exists. Only in this way are people able to work cooperatively to analyze the event and work toward its prevention.

She explains how, as a group, they have incorporated a "current events" component into each meeting:

> Each week someone is assigned to bring in an article that we've found related to racism, whether it be in Canada or the world or in [our city], and we educate ourselves about it. We'll look at the issue, we'll try to pinpoint its origins. It's hard to do when you have an article that can be written by a biased journalist but we do try to constantly educate ourselves so that if someone asks us "How do you know that racism is such a big problem in the world?" we can say, "Well, we have 57 cases that we can list to you" because I do find that in [our city] especially we'll have people tell us, "Racism isn't such a big issue here. Why are you so concerned with it?" and this constant education that we have within our group helps us to beat that misconception.

Daria and her youthful colleagues have identified the denial of racism as a significant barrier to their

work, but have redoubled their efforts to deal with it decisively. They have created and moulded a student-led AR organization that continues to take concrete steps toward deconstructing media biases, explore current news events for racist underpinnings, and share insights with others in the community.

Returning to Ted's interview, he makes the suggestion that we need to confront directly the oft-heard exculpation by white educators who claim they would never knowingly be racist, and therefore, there is actually no racism. This sentiment relates directly to the public declarations by the mostly white administrative population in Alberta that their schools could not possibly be racist places. Ted insists:

> I think what needs to occur is [for educators to address] the fact that we say we're not racist. We have to ask ourselves what we mean by that. In what ways are we not? And if we're not racist, what is it then that's causing these people to say "I've experienced racism"? In what way did they experience it? Maybe they experienced it in a way that we don't perceive. In other words, we perceive racism to be one thing but their experience of racism is a different thing. So somehow or other, that experience of racism, and therefore, the definition of racism, have to be made clearer. Then people can say "Well, yes, I am that, but that's not racism."

Reframing this apparent denial as a misinterpretation of the values and actions between marginalized and dominant group members seems to Ted a good first step in addressing this barrier to AR activism.

But, Ted continues, it must be followed by a serious questioning that explores the point of conflict more deeply:

> Okay, whatever we call it, then, what is it that doesn't allow people to be full participants. What is it that we need to be able to address? What do we do well that does allow people to participate? Yes, those things are non-racist, and maybe even inclusive, but how do we exclude people? So I think it's a redefinition that might have to take place.

This redefinition will also require a decentering by members of historically privileged groups to expose their own ethnocentricity and ignorance to the experiences of others. To Ted, goodwill and the desire to be a good person and to accept differences in one's interactions with people is simply not enough to bring about systemic change:

> It's very easy, as a WASP, to have the view that "My intentions are good and I don't harbour any ill-feelings in my heart towards anybody." That makes me ask, okay, what is racism for that person? Racism has got everything to do with intent, and there is a lack of understanding of the experience of being racist, of being a recipient of racism. So then I think the only way you can do that is through our bringing people into some kind of experience where the light would go on. This goes back to what we were doing many years ago: attempting to provide an experience that causes the person to see how systems and attitudes and assumptions and so on can marginalize people without ever any kind of intent.

Again the conversation returns to the primacy and potential of effective educational programming to help ameliorate the suffocating effects of our failure in education to address racism directly. Efforts continue in this regard, and great strides have admittedly been made in the day-to-day treatment of diversity in staff rooms for example.

It was considered widely acceptable, even within the last decade or so, for teachers or administrators to tell blatantly racist jokes under certain conditions (i.e., no members of the group being targeted were present, or if they were, they offered their implicit "consent" to the telling of the offensive joke, and the person expressed the proviso that he or she did not really mean anything serious by the telling of it). Ted reflects that "now, you just don't get that. It's just not part of the ethos of the school. There have been changes that have been made, no question about it. We are a more open society in that way. But not the systemic stuff. That hasn't changed a bit!"

Perhaps we have not even changed our own belief systems, though people understand the socially acceptable ways to deal with diversity issues in "mixed company." Ted suggests that one

problem with changing systemic biases is that it is very difficult to change individuals' deeply held beliefs around difference. The endeavour to make our schools and communities less racist is obviously not a simple matter, and Ted and the others remind us that there are so many facets of these issues, even for each of us to confront personally, in order to chip away at inequity and unfairness.

My research participants confirm that there are indeed barriers to our work in schools brought about by the hidden nature of racism, whether these be imposed by individual choices by people in decision making positions, by unchallenged structural limitations, or by the deliberate avoidance of possible topics of contention. This situation may emerge partly from our Canadian politeness to shy away from controversy and conflict, and partly from a subconscious desire to deny the racism that perpetuates an inequitable playing field that benefits only certain players.

But these participants' incisive personal reflections on the subject of denial are illuminating, including their sharing insights addressing specific blind spots in facing racist beliefs, dealing with administrators who may fear repercussions and backlash, identifying the need for concrete sources of data showing evidence of a problem, and addressing systemic barriers that remain below the surface for most of us, among other issues. Their candor in sharing concrete instances in their own struggle reconfirms for me the personal strength and stamina of committed activists working in diverse coalitions of like-minded colleagues with their eyes wide open to this inhibiting condition. Their creative approaches to the denial of racism and other growing hurdles in the struggle for social justice seem to encourage them somehow to jump ever higher.

Conclusion

As suggested by the example above, my participants contribute a great richness of understandings of emergent theorizing on social justice work, on promising future research directions, and on the practical planning and daily activities of activists. Their regular flashes of insight offer new evidence for looking at school-based activists as critical theorists, school change consultants, curriculum planners, community activists, and cultural critics, among other vital roles. I wish to emphasize the significance of their emerging participation as previously undervalued partners in educational research and theorizing.

I strongly recommend that educational researchers engage more actively with practitioners currently based in schools, the sites that occupy the epicenters of meaning for those with a focus on public education. Teachers are ideally positioned within the education system to inform a wide variety of current academic interests surrounding social justice pedagogy. Their under-representation in scholarly work is often explained by their being disinterested in participating in--or simply incapable of offering meaningful input into--contemporary scholarship in this area. Far from being anti-intellectual or non-academic workers as some scholars have portrayed them, the teacher activists who participated in this study showed themselves to be insightful and perspicacious consumers of academic theory, educational research, popular media, and contemporary culture. Their missing voices in contemporary social justice research reveal the existence of a silent void that must be filled with a cacophony of new viewpoints to hearken in future explorations.

As my current research shows, teachers can also inform contemporary debates in the academic literature if they are offered meaningful opportunities to engage with sources they believe are relevant to their practice. My participating teachers had much to say about a variety of ongoing issues, including the notion of Afrocentric education, the apparent AR and MC dichotomy in the literature, the backlash against diversity programs among peers, administration, and media sources, the pervasive denial of racism in our society, negotiating partnerships with community groups, and many other concerns of relevance to those in activist coalitions. Their expertise as practitioners can provide meaningful new perspectives for social justice theorists and researchers alike. The rich potential for these linkages makes the negotiation of equitable research partnerships a promising venture indeed.

Likewise, the student activists showed their prowess as informed and critical researchers in

their own right, tuned into current educational research and curricular content, and noting the need for specific changes to the offerings in schools and communities toward more effective social justice education. I implore the educational research community to consider their further engagement as leaders in social justice activism and education, not simply as subjects of those studying learning models or youth culture, for example.

Some of the student activists with whom I spoke were already informed on some of the issues already of concern to social justice theorists, including the resistance to AR education by some teachers, the historical denial of racism in Canada, and the disputes between some MC and AR proponents. I believe more research is needed that seeks their understandings of specific problematic aspects of social justice pedagogy, such as the diversity backlash emerging during times of economic restraint, the racist undertones in contemporary discourse on immigration, and the anti-youth sentiments in popular media. Seeking their perspectives on other issues of direct relevance to social justice pedagogy only makes sense in light of a public education model that places their learning as its focus.

Including young people as meaningful contributors to the ongoing dialogues in theoretical, research, and professional literature around social justice education is a long-overdue inclusion of voices whose traditional placement at the margins of this discourse seems ironically exclusive. Even if a few more academics invite young people to become respectful partners in collaborative research projects, under the terms and conditions that fulfill their own needs, this will be a significant step toward correcting serious omissions in past studies of schools and students.

My research shows both teacher and student activists to be valuable participants in the quest to refine our understandings of social justice theory and practice. Their insightful and varied responses to my hypotheses open new areas for possible academic exploration. This exercise also reveals that the benefits of collaborative research activities are reaped by my sample of teacher and student activists, some of whom helped to shape and focus the research questions from the outset. If, in the quest to make schools and communities more equitable, teachers and students are afforded more opportunities to "roll up their sleeves" and participate in educational research themselves, all parties stand to gain enrichment at several levels.

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